

Dr. Lindberg's Talented Assistant – An Interview with Pat Carson

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Patricia (Pat) Carson was Donald A. B. Lindberg M.D.'s Senior Executive Assistant for more than three highly productive decades.

'I loved working for him,' Pat said in a May 2021 interview.

Among other efforts, Pat helped organize the NLM Board of Regents meetings, the NLM Holiday party, some of the Friends of the National Library of Medicine activities, many of the Library's visitors/speakers and Dr. Lindberg's travel and schedule. Other memoirs explain the array of speakers, social, and other events that Pat coordinated provided part of the stimulating, family atmosphere which NLM employees enjoyed for more than a generation [1-2].

Looking back, Pat highlighted the behind-the-scenes preparation for the opening of NLM's *Frankenstein: Penetrating the Secrets of Nature* exhibition, which Dr. Lindberg described as one of his most memorable evenings at NLM.

Pat explained organizing the *Frankenstein* exhibit opening was special because it allowed her to display her expertise in historical costumes. The *Frankenstein* exhibit's opening featured a costume gathering. Pat owned a costume store in Maryland, which especially flourished during Halloween and holiday seasons.

NLM's *Frankenstein* exhibition was partially inspired by Mary Shelley's story (in 1816), which introduced some of the scientific advances of her era and raised issues about the socio-cultural impact of unchecked power and self-serving ambition [3]. The exhibition provided an evidence-based platform to update and appreciate some of the aforementioned issues.

For the *Frankenstein* opening, Pat furnished a Louis XIV 'sun king' costume for Dr. Lindberg and helped dress Mary Lindberg as 'Marie Antoinette.' Pat said it was a challenge to find a faux sword to accompany Dr. Lindberg's costume and a wig to complete Marie Antoinette's look.

Mary Lindberg, who participated in the Carson interview, explained she returned with Dr. Lindberg from a trip to Charleston, SC, on the afternoon of the *Frankenstein* exhibit's opening. Mary recalled she proceeded directly from the airport to the event where Pat readied their costumes.

Before the trip, Mary decided it would be fun (and appropriate) to adorn her Marie Antoinette costume with an in-character cake. Mary explained she placed a Limoge cake plate in her luggage and planned to buy a cake in the afternoon before the event.

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However, Mary's plans almost backfired when she could not find a cake to buy in the airport during her return trip to Washington. Eventually, a Starbucks employee reluctantly agreed to sell the coffee store's supply of cake slices.

When the Starbucks employee asked Mary why she insisted on buying *all* the remaining slices, she responded: 'I'm attending a costume party as Marie Antoinette tonight in Washington.' While the employee remained semi-incredulous, Pat noted the pastries indeed complimented Mary's costumed character.

Incidentally, Mary presented the plate to Pat on her retirement from NLM.

Overall, 'Dr. Lindberg looked stately, and Mary looked gorgeous!' Pat said.

Pat also reminisced about two occasions where her improvisation enabled NLM meetings to proceed smoothly. In the 1980s, after extensive planning for an NLM-sponsored international biomedical informatics conference, the catering staff failed to show up for an attendee dinner. Pat explained she was forced to organize volunteers on the spot to cook and serve a meal for more than a thousand people, many of whom never knew about the evening's potential culinary catastrophe.

On the mid-morning of September 11, 2001, a planned, catered luncheon for the NLM Board of Regents was canceled because NLM (and NIH) were forced to close mid-morning. (More about the events on the morning of September 11th are described in two of the book's memoirs) [4-5].

As the day's dreadful news accumulated, Pat realized the Board members who lived outside of Washington would be trapped without a way to travel home - and Washington area restaurants would be closed. She and Mary responded by inviting the stranded Board members and meeting participants to the Lindberg's residence that evening. However, Pat realized a dinner for the invitees necessitated serving the food initially planned for lunch.

Pat packed all the food and moved it to Dr. Lindberg's convertible – and somehow averted spoilage. Fittingly, some of the guests at the impromptu dinner never knew their evening meal was transported and repurposed.

Pat's ability to organize activities and work with others remains so respected that people who assisted with NLM events frequently inquire about her welfare - years after retirement. During a recent visit to a local French restaurant (where many NLM occasions were held), its veteran maître d' asked Mary: 'how is Pat Carson?' 'This happens all the time,' Mary exclaimed. 'Those who worked with Pat remember her so fondly'

Mary added Pat's admirers include the members of the Lindberg family, many of whom know Pat well.

Otherwise, during the era they worked together, Pat often described Dr. Lindberg as demanding but fair, dedicated but understanding, and highly focused but tolerant.

Besides Dr. Lindberg, Mary, and Donald West King M.D. (NLM's long-time Deputy Director), Pat lauded working with NLM staff members Kathy Cravedi, Janet Laylor, and David Nash. Pat quickly smiled and applauded when she mentioned each of their names. Pat added she keeps in touch with all three.

'Yes, NLM was a busy place, but it often was fun,' Pat said.

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